

CHAPTER 4: ISSUES FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION IN MONTANA

This chapter outlines the top priority issues related to outdoor recreation in Montana, based on the analysis of recreation facility supply, facility needs, and demand discussed in the previous two chapters, including input from Montana recreation stakeholders. But first, some perspective is provided about the importance of recreation to the State of Montana.

The Link Between Recreation and Public Health

An overarching theme related to the SCORP is the link between recreation and public health. Outdoor recreation is important for the State of Montana because of its impacts on overall quality of life, including physical and mental health. There is a vital—and often overlooked—connection between outdoor recreation on public and private lands, parks and healthy communities. Like other states, Montana is experiencing extraordinary increases in costs for public health care (Medicaid, Medicare) due to an aging population and the increasingly sedentary lifestyles of its residents. Investing in preventative health measures such as community recreation programs, and promoting increased utilization of these programs, may reduce future costs for treatment of illnesses related to sedentary behaviors.

In December 2001 report, U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher made the connection between obesity and the need for communities to increase the development of parks and recreation areas. "Overweight and obesity may soon cause as much preventable disease and death as cigarette smoking," according to Satcher. "People tend to think of overweight and obesity as strictly a personal matter, but there is much that communities can and should do to address these problems." Some of his recommendations include requiring physical education in all school grades, providing more healthy food options on school campuses, and providing safe and accessible recreational facilities for residents of all ages.

In an historic first, the Surgeon General recommended that citizens view obesity as a community issue, rather than as a personal one, making the connection between personal health and livable communities through the creation of community parks and recreation areas. Among the strategies Dr. Satcher advocates, several are directly related to outdoor recreation:

1. Ensure daily, quality physical education for all school grades. Currently, only one state in the country -- Illinois -- requires physical education for grades K-12, while only about one in four teenagers nationwide take part in some form of physical education.
2. Make community facilities available for physical activity for all people, including on the weekends.
3. Create more opportunities for physical activity at work sites.

"Communities can help when it comes to health promotion and disease prevention," Satcher said. "When there are no safe places for children to play, or for adults to walk, jog, or ride a bike, that is a community responsibility. When school lunchrooms or workplace cafeterias don't offer healthy and appealing food choices, that is a

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- ♦ Gaps between Supply & Demand
- ♦ ADA Compliance
- ♦ Resources to Manage & Maintain Facilities
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“There are escalating health consequences associated with inactivity among older Americans. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), four out of ten Americans age 45-64 are sedentary, increasing to six out of ten for those 75 and older.”

Source: AARP, May 8, 2002



community responsibility. When new or expectant parents are not educated about the benefits of breast-feeding, that is a community responsibility. And when we don't require daily physical education in our schools, that is also a community responsibility."

Secretary Tommy Thompson of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services recently stated, "Overweight and obesity are among the most pressing new health challenges we face today. Our modern environment has allowed these conditions to increase at alarming rates and become a growing health problem for our nation. By confronting these conditions, we have tremendous opportunities to prevent the unnecessary disease and disability they portend for our future."

Healthy People 2010 is a statement of national health objectives designed to identify the most significant preventable threats to health and to establish national goals to reduce these threats. Physical activity tops the list of leading health indicators. A sedentary lifestyle contributes to serious chronic health conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and overweight and obesity. Additional information is available at Healthy People 2010 web site: <http://www.healthypeople.gov/About/>

Hearts ‘n Parks is a national, community-based program supported by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and the National Recreation and Park Association. It is designed to help park and recreation agencies encourage heart-healthy lifestyles in their communities. Additional information is available at the Hearts ‘n Parks web site: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/prof/heart/obesity/hrt_n_pk/; and National Recreation and Park Association web site: www.nrpa.org.

In the early planning stages of 2003-2007 SCORP development, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks formed a partnership with the Cardiovascular Health Program of the Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services (DPHHS). Together, the two departments requested inclusion in Montana's annual BRFSS survey. BRFSS (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System) is a program, sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, that has collected and reported national health-behavior data since 1984. DPHHS assisted Montana State Parks in developing an Outdoor Recreation module consisting of eight questions (see Chapter 3). This module, the first of its kind nationally, was an essential part of the data gathering efforts and greatly assisted in identifying key outdoor recreation issues for the Montana SCORP.

There are ten key issues identified through the BRFSS, online survey of facility managers and other research and public outreach efforts described in Chapters 2 and 3. The ten issues are grouped into four categories and discussed on the following pages:

- 4.1 Gaps Between Supply & Demand
- 4.2 ADA Compliance
- 4.3 Adequate Funding & Other Resources to Manage & Maintain Recreation Facilities
- 4.4 Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Programs & Grants

4.1 Gaps Between Supply & Demand

There are six key areas where gaps exist between supply and demand, based on the statewide facility inventory survey of recreation facility managers (Chapter 2: Supply) and the Montana citizen surveys (BRFSS, ITRR and BBER Resident and Nonresident studies, Chapter 3: Demand). Those six issue areas are described below.

ISSUE 1: Inadequate swimming pool facilities to serve local needs.

This need was rated highest of all outdoor recreation facilities among local facility managers, indicating both a need for new construction and for upgrades to existing swimming pools. Swimming facilities also were identified as a top priority need by Montana citizens, as reported in the BRFSS survey results in the previous chapter. Cost of maintenance and management also is an issue for many pool facility managers. See Tables 2.5-2.14 and 2.16 in Chapter 2, and Tables 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.13, 3.14 and 3.17 in Chapter 3.

ISSUE 2: Insufficient quality and quantity of recreation facilities for youth.

While many of the facilities identified by managers as top priorities are not exclusively used by youth, they are most frequently associated with youth. The types of facilities mentioned most frequently are swimming pools, skate parks (for skate boarders, roller bladers and BMX bikers), play fields (baseball, softball, football, soccer, track), playgrounds and educational and interpretive facilities and programs. In many cases, the facilities are non-existent, or the number of them is insufficient to meet the needs of community recreationists. In other cases, the facilities are in disrepair, are not ADA-compliant or are unsafe (presenting a liability hazard and problems with insurance carriers). Many communities have insufficient resources to maintain or upgrade their facilities. See Tables 2.5-2.14 and 2.16 in Chapter 2, and Tables 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.13, 3.14 and 3.17 in Chapter 3.

ISSUE 3: Need for continued access to, and maintenance of, rural and backcountry trails and use areas for hiking, biking, skiing, equine, and motorized (OHV, snowmobile) recreation.

As was outlined in the previous chapter, demand for both motorized and non-motorized forms of recreation in rural and backcountry areas has grown over the last decade. Most of the state's rural and backcountry trail systems are located on U.S. Forest Service and BLM lands. In many places, motorized and non-motorized recreationists have been able to travel virtually anywhere on those lands that the topography allowed. As use has increased, the impacts on the land and conflicts between users also have increased, creating a need to more closely manage all kinds of recreational use. Both the Forest Service and the BLM currently are developing updated Travel Plans for each national forest and BLM unit. A key challenge for land management agencies relates to the need for good data in order to make good management decisions. Collection of the data, and good management decisions based on the data, require resources of funding and staff. Resolution of conflict requires a willingness from all parties to work proactively together on solutions that will provide for the sustainability of Montana's outstanding natural resources, while offering a variety of recreation opportunities and respecting the recreation choices of all users.



Statewide Trail Miles by Type*

<u>Trail Type</u>	<u>Miles</u>
Walking/Hiking Only	3,645
Bike/Pedestrian	716
Horse/Hiking	16,939
XC Skiing (groomed)	565
OHV (federal only)	4,105
Snowmobile (groomed)	5,594

* Agency estimates of designated system route trails only. Does not include roads or user-created trails.

Source: SCORP Statewide Recreation Facility Manager Survey, October 2002 (see Chapter 2 for full report of results).



What is a "Trail?"

Montana State Trails Plan: Trail will be defined very generally as a path, right-of-way, or other linear corridor used by the public for outdoor recreation (including both motorized and non-motorized modes), or alternative (non-motorized) transportation.

Federal RTP Program: A recreational trail is defined as a thoroughfare or track across land or snow, used for recreational purposes including, but not limited to, such uses as bicycling, Nordic (cross-county) skiing, day hiking, equestrian activities, jogging or similar fitness activities, trail biking, overnight and long-distance backpacking, roller skating, in-line skating, dog sledding, running, snowmobiling, aquatic or water activity, and vehicular travel by motorcycle, four-wheel drive, or all-terrain off-road vehicles. The term "thoroughfare or track" excludes roads, generally accessible by low-clearance passenger vehicles, unless those roads are specifically designated for trail use by the managing agencies, but includes high-clearance primitive roads.

Forest Service Manual & Trails Handbook:

- A trail is a pathway for foot, horse or trail vehicles
- Trail vehicles are bikes, snowmobiles, scooters, and all terrain vehicles (ATV)
- An ATV is any motorized, off-highway vehicle 50 inches or less wide
- A "four-wheel-drive-way" is "a Forest Development road included in the Forest Development Transportation Plan and commonly used by four-wheel drive, high-clearance vehicles with a width greater than 50 inches

In fiscal year 2002, recreational motor vehicle registrations and a portion of state and federal gas taxes provided more than \$2.6 million for the Recreation Trails Program (RTP), the Snowmobile Trails Program and the OHV Trails Program that are administered by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks for trail maintenance, safety and education programs. Some of this funding might be used to collect user data and conduct trail inventories to assist land managers in their decision-making and travel plans. Because of the increasing demand for both motorized and non-motorized recreation, it is critical that public agencies work in partnership with user groups to address these issues strategically for the future enjoyment of all Montanans. See Tables 2.5-2.14 and 2.16 in Chapter 2, and Tables 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.13, 3.14 and 3.17 in Chapter 3.

ISSUE 4: Need for increased miles and maintenance of urban and rural trails.

Walking, hiking and bicycling are among the most common outdoor recreation activities of both Montanans and nonresident visitors. Montanans desire more access to urban walking, jogging, biking, and roller blading trails, as well as rural hiking and biking opportunities. See Tables 2.7 - 2.16 in Chapter 2, and Figures 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.9, 3.10, 3.13-3.17, Figure 3.8 in Chapter 3.7, and Montana State Trails Plan.

ISSUE 5: Insufficient access for water-based recreation.

Fishing and boating are near the top of the list of Montanans' favorite outdoor recreation activities, and also are a significant tourist draw. The number of fishing access sites (FAS), and other public land access to water-based recreation, is inadequate in some areas to handle demand, causing negative impacts in undesignated areas. Moreover, existing fishing access sites need to be upgraded. Boating facilities also are needed to handle increasing demand (boat ramps, launch sites, docks). Paved access to water-based recreation facilities was identified as a need at some facilities for ADA compliance. See Tables 2.7-2.16 in Chapter 2 and Tables 3.3, 3.4, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.13, 3.15, 3.16, 3.17 and Figure 3.7 in Chapter 3.

ISSUE 6: Inadequate access for wildlife-based recreation (hunting and wildlife viewing).

During public meetings and other public input processes of the Montana Tourism & Recreation Strategic Plan 2003-2007, issues related to hunting and fishing access were a frequently cited concern. Montanans historically have enjoyed access not only to public lands, but also to much of the state's privately owned lands for recreational purposes--especially hunting and fishing. However, in recent years, economic pressures on farmers, ranchers and timber companies have forced closures or sale of private lands for recreational and residential development; resulting in reduced access. At the same time, federal and state budgets and environmental issues have curtailed agencies' abilities to construct and maintain access roads and trails on public lands. The population of Montana, and the number of nonresident visitors, has increased in the past decade, creating more demand on diminishing accessible lands and waters. Loss of access to public and private lands, and limits on methods and modes of access, has created increasing conflicts among user groups in Montana. Several programs are currently in place, and achieving success, to address access issues (see sidebar, next page). Funding for the Montana FWP Block Management program is insufficient to increase the number of private lands maintained for public access, and block management

compensation does not cover landowner costs of allowing public access. See Tables 2.7-2.16 in Chapter 2 and Tables 3.3, 3.4, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.13, 3.15, 3.16, 3.17 and Figure 3.7 in Chapter 3.

4.2 ADA Compliance

By its very nature, outdoor recreation presents challenges to ADA compliance. Some sites and facilities are located in terrain that is rugged or remote, or managed to maintain them as “primitive.” Therefore, in some cases, the goal of ADA compliance focuses more on reducing impediments to accessibility, rather than on intensive development or improvements at a site.

ISSUE 7: Need for upgrades to provide more ADA-compliant outdoor recreation facilities.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 12% of Montana residents are classified as having a physical disability. By age group, 1% of residents age 5-15 have a physical disability, 7% of residents age 16-64 have a physical disability, and 27% of people age 65+ have a physical disability. Many facilities in Montana are not ADA compliant, which affects a number of potential users: people with special needs and disabilities, small children (strollers) and older residents and visitors. Montana has the fourth oldest population in the U.S. Moreover, mature travelers make up 80% of all leisure travelers (and spend the most money), so to provide outdoor recreation for them means ensuring accessibility and amenities where possible and practical. See Table 2.15 in Chapter 2 and Table 3.12 in Chapter 3.

4.3 Resources to Manage & Maintain Recreation Facilities

ISSUE 8: Lack of awareness of the SCORP, LWCF program, and other resources available to local entities for outdoor recreation facilities.

In the online survey, recreation facility managers expressed a lack of knowledge about the LWCF program and how it can help them. A SCORP Advisory Committee member commented that the low participation rate in the survey may have been due in part to a lack of awareness about what the SCORP document is, and how the SCORP planning process can support local and tribal recreation facilities. Additionally, there are other resources available for recreation facilities, but many small communities without full-time recreation staff are unaware of those resources or how to access them.

Montana Task Forces Addressing Land & Water Access Issues

Montana Interagency Access Council (MIAC), formed in mid-1990's as informal ad hoc group of state, federal and local land management agencies and groups (e.g. Montana Assn. of Counties) to discuss land and water access issues and work in collaborative fashion. Council meets two to three times per year to identify common and specific problems, and possible solutions. MIAC prints and distributes the *Montana Access Guide to Federal and State Lands*.

River Recreation Advisory Council, formed in summer 2002 “for the purpose of assisting Montana FWP with the development of a statewide framework, policy and rules for managing recreation on Montana’s rivers.” Council consists of representatives from groups interested in river recreation management, and those who will be affected by river recreation management decisions.

Agency Roundtable, formed in 2002 by Montana FWP to convene state and federal agencies that have river recreation management responsibilities. Its purpose is to exchange information on river recreation management responsibility and jurisdiction, strategic planning processes, and rules governing recreation on rivers. Agency Roundtable provides an opportunity to learn more about other agencies’ efforts to address increasing use and social conflict on rivers, and to identify opportunities to coordinate planning efforts and collaborate on projects.

Interagency Recreational Fee Demonstration Program Coordination Task Force, organized to facilitate interagency coordination of the federal Fee Demo Program.

Montana Tourism and Recreation Initiative (MTRI) is a multi-agency cooperative working together to plan and fund mutually beneficial tourism and recreation projects that serve the needs of residents and visitors, both national and international. A common goal is to facilitate excellence in tourism and recreation experiences while protecting and conserving the social, cultural and natural resource values of Montanans. By sharing information and combining time, funding and other resources, MTRI provides a vehicle for coordinated public sector projects.

Facility Manager Comments about LWCF Program

Strengths

- It is wonderful that FWP has programs to help communities and schools in the upkeep and new construction of outdoor recreational items.
- It is an excellent program.
- Very good program.

Concerns

- The main concern is availability of funds to county and city agencies.
- Need much assistance on reservation lands.
- More funds need to be available for maintaining facilities as well as new.
- For small projects, the process is too long and cumbersome.
- It is a good program but the requirements on the needs assessments need to be more flexible.
- The survey instrument may be outdated.

Opportunities

- We certainly do not have many of the facilities aforementioned. It would be nice...to have a picnic/camping area for our families and visitors to enjoy.
- It would be very helpful to have assistance in completing grant applications so that more people can benefit.
- We appreciate the funds we have received for playground equipment. We hope that we can attain funds for our swimming pool.

- Online Survey Participants

ISSUE 9: Insufficient funding, staffing and partnerships at every level (local, tribal, state, federal) to manage and maintain outdoor recreation facilities.

Lack of stable, adequate resources leads to facilities that are not well maintained, are underused and that create user dissatisfaction. This in turn leads to safety and liability issues. A lack of public-private-tribal-nonprofit partnerships contributes to the lack of resources. Additionally, inconsistent regional boundaries used by state and federal agencies may restrict partnerships for funding resources in specific areas.

4.4 Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Grants

ISSUE 10: Need for additional funding for LWCF grant program, and simplification of the process.

The LWCF program is a tremendous resource for recreation facilities in Montana. However, the level of funding is significantly lower than the level of facility needs. Montana's large geographic area and sparse rural population creates challenges for areas with low tax base to raise funds to meet LWCF matching grant requirements. The U.S. Department of Interior matching requirement for LWCF is more burdensome than many other federal infrastructure grants, which typically require an 80-20 minimum match, and sometimes less for rural impoverished areas. Additionally, smaller communities who most need assistance with outdoor recreation facilities often are those least likely to access LWCF grant funds because they lack funding to meet LWCF matching requirements, or lack the capacity to develop grant applications, conduct community needs surveys, etc. As one survey participant commented, "Public demand for recreation programs, sites and facilities continually increases, while funding levels remain static or decrease." Refinements to the LWCF Program are needed to streamline the application process and lessen the burden on smaller communities, while still meeting national guidelines. Additionally, information and technical assistance are needed for communities to access LWCF grant funds.

The next chapter identifies goals, objectives and actions recommended to address the issues described in this chapter. At the end of Chapter 5 is an Action Table which provides a timeline and identifies organizations and agencies responsible for implementation of each action.